

Progress is fragile and fleeting, and without proper attention it can quickly be lost.

Today, pollution threatens all of the recent progress we've made at cleaning up the Chesapeake Bay. At risk is not only the ecosystem's survival, but also a way of life for so many.

What some might think of as simply a body of water is an integral natural resource, historically, economically, and culturally. Just as it has shaped the lives and livelihood of Virginians for centuries, the Bay continues to shape the character of the region. As the largest estuary in the United States, the Chesapeake Bay watershed is home to 16 million people. The watershed encompasses six states and the District of Columbia, well over 1,000 local governments, 150 major tributaries, 100,000 streams and rivers and over 11,600 miles of shoreline, plus thousands of plant and animal species.

In addition to generating billions of dollars in economic activity and recreational revenue, the Bay provides tens of thousands of jobs in the commercial seafood and recreational fishing industries alone, and is the site of multiple major ports and military bases. The Bay draws millions of tourists each year to the Commonwealth. Clean and healthy waters encourage boating, fishing and swimming, activities that are of great intrinsic value to our state and nation.

Several recent studies demonstrate how carbon pollution's detrimental effects have caused the Bay's blue crab and oyster populations to enter a downward spiral. As a result of the pollution, crabs grow faster and larger but do not develop the muscle that makes Chesapeake Bay crabs famous for their taste. This could negatively impact local industries that rely on the continued superior quality of the blue crab.

These larger crabs also pose a greater threat to the recent growth of the Bay oyster population due to their enhanced ability to break open the shells of the young bivalves. A healthy oyster population is critical to improved water quality in the Bay. These effects upon the crab and oyster populations result in an imbalance of resources that harms the Bay's delicate ecosystem.

Despite successful pollution reduction efforts, excessive nutrients like nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment from runoff also still contribute to harmful algal blooms, "dead zones" and loss of

underwater grasses.

During these challenging economic times local, state and federal financial resources are being stretched. Ongoing funding is critical to sustaining Bay clean-up progress. Now, perhaps more than ever, we must ensure that limited resources are used as efficiently and as effectively as possible.

This starts with taking a more collaborative approach to Chesapeake Bay protection and restoration. The amount of research, funding and attention dedicated through multiple states and agencies to restoring the Chesapeake Bay has made it one of the most complex environmental restoration efforts in the U.S. It's vital that we connect every federal dollar spent on this critical natural treasure to real results. That is why we have teamed up to introduce legislation that will address that problem: The Chesapeake Bay Accountability and Recovery Act.

The bill would require adoption of two methods for more efficient, effective government: crosscut budgeting and adaptive management. These techniques have successfully aided other complex environmental restoration projects. However, Bay stakeholders have not been yet able to take advantage of them in Bay clean-up efforts, where results have lagged behind the billions of dollars spent.

Crosscut budgeting will provide for a comprehensive accounting of all Bay restoration activities. The Chesapeake Bay restoration is a complex effort with many activities and expenditures at the state, federal and local level. To date, we don't have a single comprehensive assessment and reporting mechanism that identifies all restoration activities. This information will better help identify resource allocation, promote accountability and foster better policy decisions.

The second component to this bill is adaptive management. Adaptive management will provide a better means of evaluating the success and efficiency of each restoration program. It will increase coordination, reduce overlap, and improve decision making by clearly demonstrating how each project fits into the larger goal of restoring the Bay. For complex environmental restoration activities like those in the Bay, adaptive management can be a very effective tool for meeting the scientific, policy and management challenges that we face today.

We look forward to the day that this piece of legislation is no longer just a proposal, but a law that enhances efforts to clean our Bay. Movement on this bill within Congress has begun, and it recently passed out of the House Natural Resources Committee. But Bay stakeholders must demand further action from Congress. The Chesapeake Bay is a cultural and economic beacon for our region, and we will continue to push for the federal government to do its part to protect and restore the Bay for future generations.

Authored by Senator Mark Warner and Congressman Rob Wittman, originally appearing in [*The Richmond Times-Dispatch*](#) on May 26, 2013.